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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN POLISH SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE?

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education returned to the Polish public schools twenty-five years ago, shortly after the political transition. From that moment the state has undergone many changes. After 1989 Poland transformed into the country more open for relations with neighboring countries and is currently labelled as “pending for immigration”¹. Free movement of people and traveling is possible, censorship was abolished and the democratic principles of freedom of speech were introduced. Accession to the European Union as well as the Schengen area transforms the country gradually, from an emigration and transit place to an attractive destination. What is more, the important role of migration and integration policy in the EU affects the growth of interest in this issue in Poland².

Ongoing political and demographic changes are associated with the new tasks and challenges for the educational system, which should prepare students for living in society that is becoming far more culturally and religiously diverse. According to Bogusław Milerski, ideological and axiological issues, manifested particularly in religious differences, are an important area for perceiving and experiencing diversity³. Therefore, one of the forms in which intercultural education becomes a reality should be religious education. However, this requires adequate preparation of religious educators, so that they will be ready to work in a culturally diverse society.

¹ A. Weinar, *Polityka migracyjna Polski w latach 1990–2003 – próba podsumowania*, „Raporty i Analizy Centrum Stosunków Międzynarodowych” 2005, 10/05, p. 10.

² J. Białas, B. Domańska, M. Górczyńska, M. Jaźwińska, M. Łysienia, E. Ostaszewska-Żuk, M. Szczepanik, D. Witko, *Cudzoziemcy w Polsce: Podręcznik dla funkcjonariuszy publicznych*. Warszawa 2015, p. 14.

³ B. Milerski, *Kształcenie międzykulturowe w szkole z perspektywy pedagogiki religii*, paper presented at IV Ecumenical Catechetical Forum, Warszawa-Radość, 15–16 May 2009 [on-line:] <http://ekumenia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Kształcenie-miedzykulturowe-w-szkole-z-perspektywy-pedagogiki-religii-B.Milerski.pdf> [15.09.2015].

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN POLAND – THE LEGAL BASES

Religious education was restored due to two documents: *Instruction of the Minister of Education dated 3 August 1990, concerning the return of religious education to schools in the school year 1990/1991* and *Instruction of the Minister of Education dated 24 August 1990, concerning the return of religious education to schools setting out the principles of cooperation with churches and religious associations outside the Roman Catholic Church*. There were doubts about their legality⁴ but according to the judgment of the Constitutional Court of 30 January 1991, aforementioned instructions are consistent with law.

Chronologically, the next legal act regulating the presence of religious education in schools was the *Act of 7 September 1991 on the education system*⁵. On its basis a directive⁶ defining detailed framework for religious education was introduced by the Minister of National Education. According to this act, religious education (and ethics) is voluntary and participation or non-participation in these classes cannot be the cause of discrimination. The directive also defines conditions for organizing lessons of different religions than Catholicism and ethics. It sets the minimum number of students for whom the classes can be conducted as seven in a given school, or three in an interschool group. What is important, religious education is based on the programs and manuals approved by ecclesiastical authorities who only respond to the Ministry of National Education. Religious education takes place twice a week, and an evaluation mark is placed on a final certificate. Interestingly, the same document allows to place the cross in the classroom. Other religious symbols are not listed.

The directive mentioned above present in details the way of organizing religious education in schools. However, the teaching of religion is guaranteed also in the legal acts of a higher order, which came into force in the 90.: *Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland*⁷ or *Constitution of the Republic of Poland*⁸. Moreover, the professional qualifications are required from the religious

⁴ An objection has been expressed by Ewa Łętowska, then the Ombudsman. Already in August 1990 she appealed the Instructions to the Constitutional Court. She requested the recognition of Instructions as being inconsistent with the Constitution and applicable laws related to an education system, regulations between the State and the Catholic Church and the freedom of conscience and belief.

⁵ Dz. U. 1991 nr 95 poz. 425 z późn. zm., art. 12, ust. 1. *Public kindergartens, primary and secondary schools organize religious education at the request of parents, public secondary schools on request of either parents or students themselves; students decide about getting religious education after reaching the age of majority.*

⁶ *Ordinance of the Minister of National Education on the Conditions and Methods of Organizing Religious Education in Public Schools and Kindergartens from 14 April 1992 (with later amendments)* (Dz. U. 1992 nr 36 poz. 155).

⁷ *Concordat between the Holy See and the Polish Republic, signed at Warsaw on 28 July 1993* (Dz. U. 1998 nr 51 poz. 318), art. 12.

⁸ *Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997* (Dz. U. 1997 nr 78 poz. 483), art. 53, ust. 4.

educators⁹ and adding the grade from religious education to the average assessments¹⁰ has a legal mandate.

The latest legal change, concerning religious education, was introduced in 2014 as a consequence of the verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in *Case of Grzelak v. Poland* (Application No. 7710/02)¹¹. After that, The Court announced that the lack of access to ethics classes in Polish schools is a violation of the freedom of belief and non-discrimination¹². As a result of this judgement, many limitations have been abolished. Since then, starting from the school year 2014/2015, ethics classes have been organized even for one student¹³. This legal change proves the impact of European legislation, in this case the European Convention on Human Rights, on national regulations.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN POLAND – THE NEED FOR INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Poland is perceived as culturally and religiously homogeneous country. This common observation is supported by statistics. According to the results of the latest *Polish Census of 2011*, 94.8% of the population declares exclusively Polish national identity¹⁴ and 87.6% defines themselves as Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church¹⁵.

Despite of substantial homogeneity, as argued by Izabela Czerniejewska, intercultural education in Poland is needed and its shape should depend on the local specificity of cultural diversity. In Poland, on the one hand citizens interact with historical,

⁹ *Agreement between Minister of National Education and the Conference of the Polish Episcopate on Qualifications of Religious Instruction Teachers from 6 September 2000* (Dz. Urz. MEN Nr 4 poz. 20).

¹⁰ *Ordinance of the Minister of National Education on amending the ordinance on the conditions and manner of assessing, classifying and promoting pupils and students and conducting tests and examinations in public schools from 13 July 2007* (Dz. U. 2007 nr 130 poz. 906).

¹¹ The applicants – parents and son – complained that Mateusz Grzelak (the son) who according to the wish of his parents resigned from religious instruction in primary school was not able to attend alternative classes of ethics and a mark for “religion/ethics” on his school report was absent.

¹² *Case of Grzelak v. Poland – Judgement* [on-line:] <http://www.hfhrpol.waw.pl/precedens/aktualnosci/wyrok-epcz-w-sprawie-grzelak-przeciwko-polsce.html> [15.09.2015]. The complete judgement in English can be found here: <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/app/conversion/pdf/?library=ECHR&id=001-99384&filename=001-99384.pdf> [15.09.2015].

¹³ *Ordinance of the Minister of National Education amending the Ordinance on the conditions and methods of organizing religious instruction in public schools and kindergartens from 25 March 2014* (Dz. U. 2014 poz. 478).

¹⁴ L. Nowak, *Ludność: stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna: Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*, Warszawa 2013, p. 89.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

cultural and ethnic minorities¹⁶, and on the other hand – with the so-called “new minorities” meaning immigrant communities¹⁷. According to Mirosław Sobecki:

Only at school change of consciousness concerning an attitude to what is culturally different can be initiated on an adequate scale. The idea is to use the potential of school. Undoubtedly, its major strengths are an ability to build real competence and to equip [the students - E.K.] with reliable, proven and appropriately selected knowledge¹⁸.

Intercultural education that can be defined as:

an educational and tutorial process aimed at shaping the understanding of cultural differences – ranging from subcultures in the local communities up to cultures of spatially distant societies – and to prepare for dialog interaction with representatives of other cultures. Through the critical reflection, it leads to strengthening own cultural identity¹⁹

aims to reach this goal. Though this aim cannot be achieved without adequate preparation of teachers.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND EDUCATION

To take advantage of the potential of inter-religious education, teachers must obtain an appropriate competence. What is therefore an intercultural competence? In the humanities, it is widely understood as a complex and multidimensional ability, which is the result of a long-lasting process of acquiring knowledge, skills and reflection on cultural differences, required experiences and personality development²⁰.

One of the classic ways of thinking about intercultural competence in the humanistic approach is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) created in the 80. by Milton J. Bennett. According to the author, the development of intercultural competence is related to significant qualitative change, namely the transition from ethnocentrism, understood as the perception of own culture as central to reality and avoiding cultural differences, to ethnorelativism – the perception of own

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 92. The broader study on national minorities based on statistical data from *Polish Census of 2011* can be found in the following publication: I. Czerniejewska, *Edukacja wielokulturowa. Działania podejmowane w Polsce*, Toruń 2013, pp. 38–56.

¹⁷ I. Idzik, *Czy istnieje potrzeba edukacji międzykulturowej?*, „Sprawy Narodowościowe – Nowa Seria” 2004 (24–25), pp. 163–180.

¹⁸ M. Sobecki, *Kształtowanie postaw wobec odmienności jako nowe zadanie wychowania* [in:] *Edukacja międzykulturowa w wymiarze instytucjonalnym*, ed. J. Nikitorowicz, M. Sobecki, Białystok 1999, p. 96 (translation by the Author).

¹⁹ D. Markowska, *Teoretyczne podstawy edukacji międzykulturowej*, „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” 2009, (4), p. 109 (translation by the Author).

²⁰ E. Chromiec, *Edukacja w kontekście różnicy i różnorodności kulturowej: Z inspiracji naukowych obszaru niemieckojęzycznego*, Kraków 2006, p. 103.

way of thinking and behavior as one of many possible ways of thinking about reality and the search for cultural differences²¹.

Another model, useful in the context of intercultural competence of teachers, was proposed by Darla Deardorff. It is based on the grounded theory²². Similarly to Bennett, she sees intercultural competence as a process. According to Deardorff, the basis of intercultural competence are attitudes – respect, openness and curiosity. They are the foundations for the development of knowledge²³ and skills²⁴. On the basis of the attitudes, knowledge and skills internal results such as flexibility, adaptability, ethnorelativism, and empathy are accomplished. As a result, one achieves behavior and communication that are adequate and effective in an intercultural interaction. It is called an external result²⁵. Significantly, this model has been already used with regard to the teachers. For this purpose, Deardorff developed two tools, intercultural competence self-assessment questionnaire and a list of questions tending to reflect on the different elements of own intercultural competence²⁶.

Deardorff defines intercultural competence as an ability to communicate efficiently and adequately in intercultural situations, according to knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals²⁷. It means that the competence is mainly related to communication and can be successfully developed.

MODELS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – INTER-RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious education is present in public schools of almost all EU countries²⁸. It is no surprise that it appears in different forms, depending on the historical, cultural and religious contexts or legal regulations of a particular country.

²¹ M. J. Bennett, *Becoming Interculturally Competent* [in:] *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education*, ed. J. Wurzel, Newton 2004, p. 62; a detailed description of the Bennett's model can be found in: M. R. Hammer, M. J. Bennett, R. Wiseman, *Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory*, "International Journal of Intercultural Relations", 2003, (27), pp. 421–443.

²² D. K. Deardorff, *Exploring intercultural competent teaching in social sciences classrooms*, "ELISS: Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences", 2009, 2(1), p. 3.

²³ Primarily: self-knowledge, cultural self-awareness, culturally specific knowledge, understanding different worldview and perceiving the world from the perspective of "the other".

²⁴ Observation, listening, evaluation, analysis, interpretation and the identification of associations.

²⁵ K. Berardo, D. K. Deardorff, *Building cultural competence: Innovative activities and models*, Sterling, VA 2012, pp. 45–47.

²⁶ Ibidem, pp. 50–52.

²⁷ D. K. Deardorff, *Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization*, "Journal of Studies in International Education" 2006, 10 (3), pp. 247–248.

²⁸ France is an exception: there is a strict separation of church and state, and religion is considered a private matter of every citizen. Hence, it is not possible to legitimize the presence of any religion in the public area. More on this topic: B. Milerski, *Religia a szkoła: Status edukacji religijnej w szkole w ujęciu ewangelickim*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 21–27.

According to Milerski, religious education can be confessional – associated with a particular religion, denominational (confessional-catechumenal or confessional-dialogical), or non-confessional²⁹. Confessional-catechumenal attitude is based on introduction to the liturgy of a particular religious community³⁰. Religious education is considered as a form of the mission of the Church in the school environment³¹. Non-confessional attitude assumes informative and objective nature of religious instruction. In this way, teaching may be related to religious studies approach or it can be taught about different religions with an emphasis on one particular tradition. In contrast, the confessional-catechumenal and confessional-dialogical approaches not only emphasize the role of religious identification but also underline an ecumenical, philosophical and pedagogical dialogue³².

A similar typology was introduced by John Hull who defines the following models of religious education: learning religion, learning about religion and learning from religion. Learning religion refers to the situation when one chosen religious tradition is taught from the inside and the purpose of the lessons is to strengthen the faith of students. Learning about religion implies an external, nonreligious perspective dominated by descriptive and historical approach. The third model (learning from religion) puts an emphasis on humanistic education of students and their spiritual and moral development³³.

Referring to the models described above, it should be pointed that intercultural education is present especially in the countries where non-confessional, learning about religion or confessional-dialogical, learning from religion models of education dominate³⁴. According to Milerski, from this perspective religious education is a part of the overall humanistic and social education, which fulfills its core tasks, including those intercultural³⁵. In this context, it seems reasonable to assume that:

The primary task in the process of preparing all students for harmonious life in a pluralistic society should certainly shape the understanding of the multiplicity of views and religious practices, and providing insight into the world of values and interests of individual national groups. (...) Religious education shares with other subjects an aim

²⁹ B. Milerski, *Religia a szkoła: Status edukacji religijnej w szkole w ujęciu ewangelickim*, Warszawa 1998, p. 274.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 274.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 276.

³² Ibidem, p. 297.

³³ J. Hull, *The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective* [in:] *Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from around the World*, ed. Z. T. Caldwell, Oxford 2000, pp. 4–11.

³⁴ B. Milerski, *Kształcenie międzykulturowe w szkole z perspektywy pedagogiki religii*, paper presented at IV Ecumenical Catechetical Forum, Warszawa-Radość, 15–16 May 2009 [on-line:] <http://ekumenia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Kształcenie-miedzykulturowe-w-szkole-z-perspektywy-pedagogiki-religii-B.Milerski.pdf> [15.09.2015].

³⁵ Ibidem.

to help pupils in raising their skills, knowledge and social competencies necessary to develop their personal and social life³⁶.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF RELIGIOUS TEACHERS – OWN PRELIMINARY STUDIES

The aim of the presented research was a preliminary diagnosis of the religious education in the context of intercultural competence of teachers working in public schools. Contact with the subjects was established *via* the Catechetical Department the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków so the study includes only the Roman Catholic teachers. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to all catechists who have shared their email addresses with the Curia (approximately 300 people). Only five teachers responded to the message, so the results are preliminary and not representative. However even these few interviews broaden the knowledge on religious education in addition to intercultural competence of teachers and indicate the potential for its development.

The subjects are secular catechists working in villages near Kraków. The research method is a semi-structured interview which deals with such topics as: preparation and motivation to teach religion, religious education goals, an alternative to religious instruction (ethics), learning about other religions, and preparation for teaching about different religions and cultures.

When it comes to preparatory training, all respondents have a higher theological education – the Master's degree or the Bachelor of Science³⁷. It is worth noting that all subjects have multi-directional education. In addition to theology they have completed, usually post-graduate, majors such as physical education, family and sexual education, ethics, special education, history, or art studies. Motivation to teaching religion is inner. Teachers have admitted that they are interested in religion personally and they are seeking to be a behavioral model to the younger generation.

According to the respondents, the purpose of religious education is first and foremost a transfer of religious knowledge (while not judging the practice) and deepening personal faith of their students. Religious education in primary schools is also intended to revise the prayer positions, texts of prayers, and proper behavior in a church. One of the respondents also indicated a desire to shape thinking about the values and distinguishing good from evil.

³⁶ M. Grimmitt, *Die gegenwärtigen Probleme der religiösen Erziehung in England*, „Jahrbuch der Religionspädagogik” t. 3, 1986 [in:] B. Milerski, *Kształcenie międzykulturowe w szkole z perspektywy pedagogiki religii*, paper presented at IV Ecumenical Catechetical Forum, Warszawa-Radość, 15–16 May 2009 [on-line:] <http://ekumenia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Kształcenie-miedzykulturowe-w-szkole-z-perspektywy-pedagogiki-religii-B.Milerski.pdf> [15.09.2015] (translation by the Author).

³⁷ Licentiate of Sacred Theology is an academic degree bestowed on Catholic theology faculties of pontifical universities. It is part of the so-called Roman system of degrees and is not identical with the professional title of non-theological universities bachelor. Scientific bachelor is an academic degree higher than master's degree, lower than doctorate.

Ethics classes are conducted only in one of the researched schools. Interestingly, they are also lead by a professionally active catechist. According to him, the purpose of ethics classes is identical with the purpose of religious instruction, except that in the case of ethics, one does not refer to Christian values. In other schools ethics classes are not conducted because “the parents did not wish to”³⁸, “because there is no such need” (all students attend religion classes – E. K.), or ethics classes failed to be organized (“there was a proposal but it collapsed”).

Learning about other religions is present in the content of teaching and in the curriculum (for example, one of the catechists mentioned a set of lessons “I respect and recognize the Others”) what is confirmed by all of the respondents. However, this is primarily the teaching about the three great monotheisms (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) limited to basic factual data or other sects of Christianity (ecumenism). Respondents even point out that their school is Catholic so there is no praxis to teach about other religions. If religion in school is conducted in the religious studies formula, it will be additional subject, focusing mainly on teaching the history of religion. Teachers, however, try to respond to students' interest in different religions and the questions asked. Other religions are presented by students using multimedia such as photos or videos.

The greatest diversity of views expressed by the teachers concerns their preparation for teaching about other religions. Part of the respondents assessed their knowledge about other religions as very high, even though it was acquired many years ago, while studying theology. One of the respondents was convinced that she obtained all the necessary knowledge at university (“After all, I was at university!”). Some of the statements have shown the presence of stereotypes and intolerance towards Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses. It should be noted that the same person who has shown negative attitudes towards the followers of these religions denied the existence of prejudice (“Prejudice is the slogan for journalists. There is no such thing as prejudice.”). In contrast, some of the subjects showed a proactive approach, emphasizing the importance of self-education. They highlighted the role of the written word but also pointed other sources of knowledge about other religions and cultures such as their own trips abroad or friends confessing a different religion.

CONCLUSION

Religious education in Poland is dominated by a confessional approach. As presented in the first part of the article, Polish law assumes that it is a particular religious community, not the state which is responsible for the curriculum and the selection of the content of teaching. According to the core curriculum³⁹ and the statements

³⁸ This and the following quotes are statements of the respondents translated by the Author.

³⁹ *Core Curriculum of Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* [on-line:] <http://www.katecheza.episkopat.pl/index.php/menu/nauczanie-religii-w-szkole/dokumenty-koscielne/32-podstawa-programowa-2010> [15.09.2015].

of the respondents, the main aim of the religious (Roman Catholic) education is the Christian formation of students and leading them to mature faith.

The goals set in this manner do not leave much space for the intercultural religious education proposed by Milerski. Thus the shift towards a non-confessional approach is not likely. As was mentioned by one of the respondents: "Religious education cannot follow this way because it won't be a Roman Catholic religion teaching, it won't be a catechesis". The same subject has also added that:

Catechesis is not religious studies, it must be clearly stated (...). We will not speak in [name of the town] about the tolerance for Jews, as nobody has ever seen here any Jew.

However, as shown in the article, intercultural competence is a subject of a gradual, qualitative change, so it can be developed and trained. It is hoped that observed political and demographic changes in Poland, related to the migration processes and the development of intercultural education, will affect the broader interest of intercultural competencies of religious teachers. So that one can hear more often teachers' statements such as the following:

I cannot imagine not to speak of other religions because the Christian religion is thirty percent of the world's population. (...) You cannot be a man who believes that what he thinks is always on the top.

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SUMMARY

This article concerns religious education in Polish schools. The main aim of the paper is to diagnose its potential to support intercultural education. The analysis is constructed upon the legal aspects that form the religious education's dominant model. Furthermore, the need for intercultural education in Poland is rationalized. For this kind of education proper preparation of teachers and development of their intercultural competencies should be ensured. The term “intercultural competence” is clarified in the context of developmental models created by Milton Bennett and Darla Deardorff. Theoretical analysis provides the basis for research, which main point is to address the question whether religious educators are competent enough to conduct intercultural courses or not. The preliminary studies are based on five semi-structured interviews. They concern such issues as preparation and motivation for teaching religion, learning about other religions in frame of religious education, and the preparation for teaching about other religions and cultures.